

RETAINWORKS Impact Study

BACKGROUND

RETAINWORKS was part of the Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN), a collaborative initiative between the U.S. Department of Labor and the Social Security Administration to test early intervention strategies that help workers stay in or return to the workforce (Patnaik et al., 2025). Kentucky, Minnesota, Ohio, and Vermont were also selected to participate.

Implementation findings indicate that provider engagement, coordinated return-to-work planning, and workforce partnerships were central components of program delivery (Keith et al., 2024). Evidence from the Centers for Occupational Health and Education (COHE) model suggests that coordinated occupational health interventions can reduce disability duration and improve employment outcomes (Wickizer et al., 2011). Additional research on the COHE model demonstrates long-term reductions in disability and workers' compensation costs associated with coordinated return-to-work interventions (Wickizer et al., 2018).

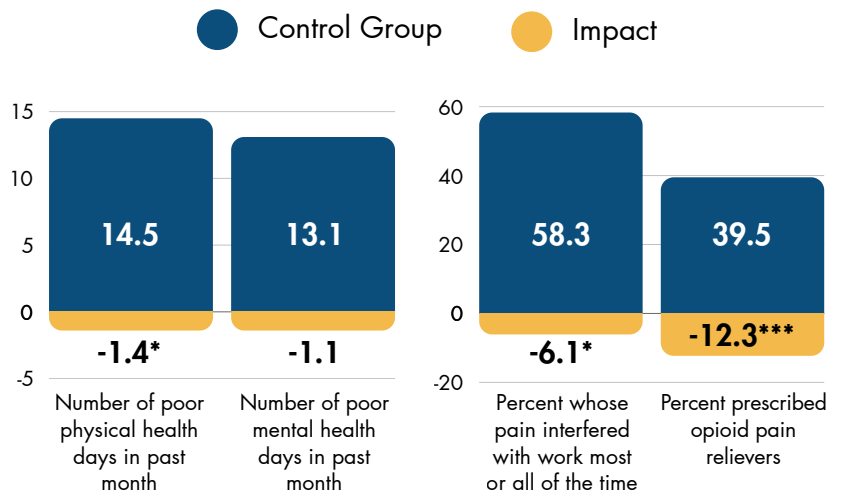
RETAINWORKS used coordinated return-to-work services that integrated healthcare providers, workforce professionals, and employers to support employment retention following injury or illness (Patnaik et al., 2025). The Kansas Department of Commerce was the lead agency. Ascension Via Christi, the Kansas Clinical Care Collaborative, Stormont Vail Health, and the University of Kansas Health System, in coordination with the **KANSASWORKS** Local Workforce Development Boards, provided coordinated interventions to help participants return to work as soon as medically able. Mathematica, the third-party evaluator of the demonstration, provided the findings referenced below.

EARLY FINDINGS

RETAINWORKS improved outcomes for treatment participants compared to the control group, reducing the:

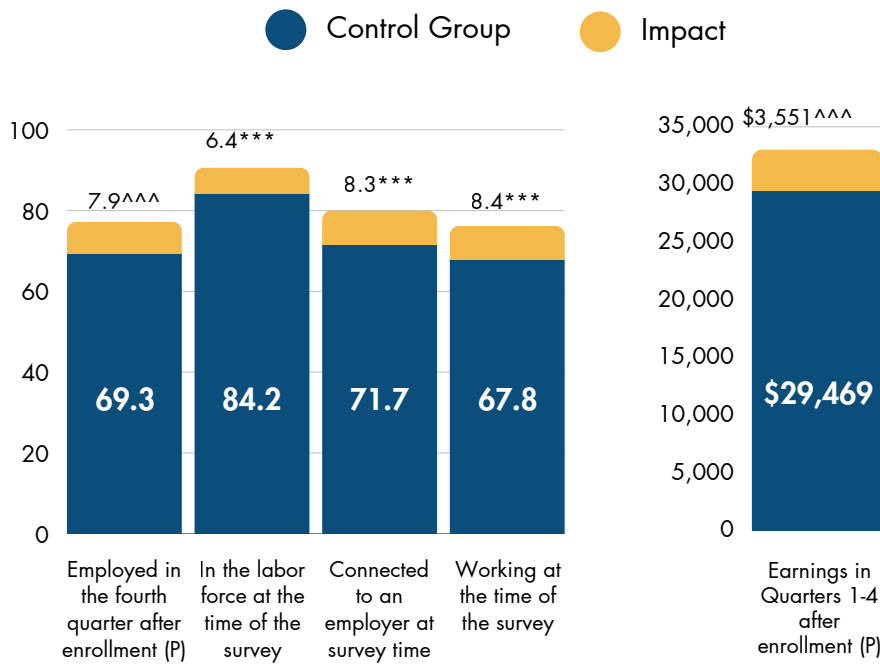
- Number reporting poor physical health days in the past month
- Percent reporting that pain interfered with work most or all of the time
- Percent prescribed opioid pain relievers

Early impact findings also show improvements in labor force attachment and health outcomes shortly after enrollment in RETAIN programs (Patnaik et al., 2025).



ONE-YEAR IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

RETAINWORKS increased participants' employment and earnings.



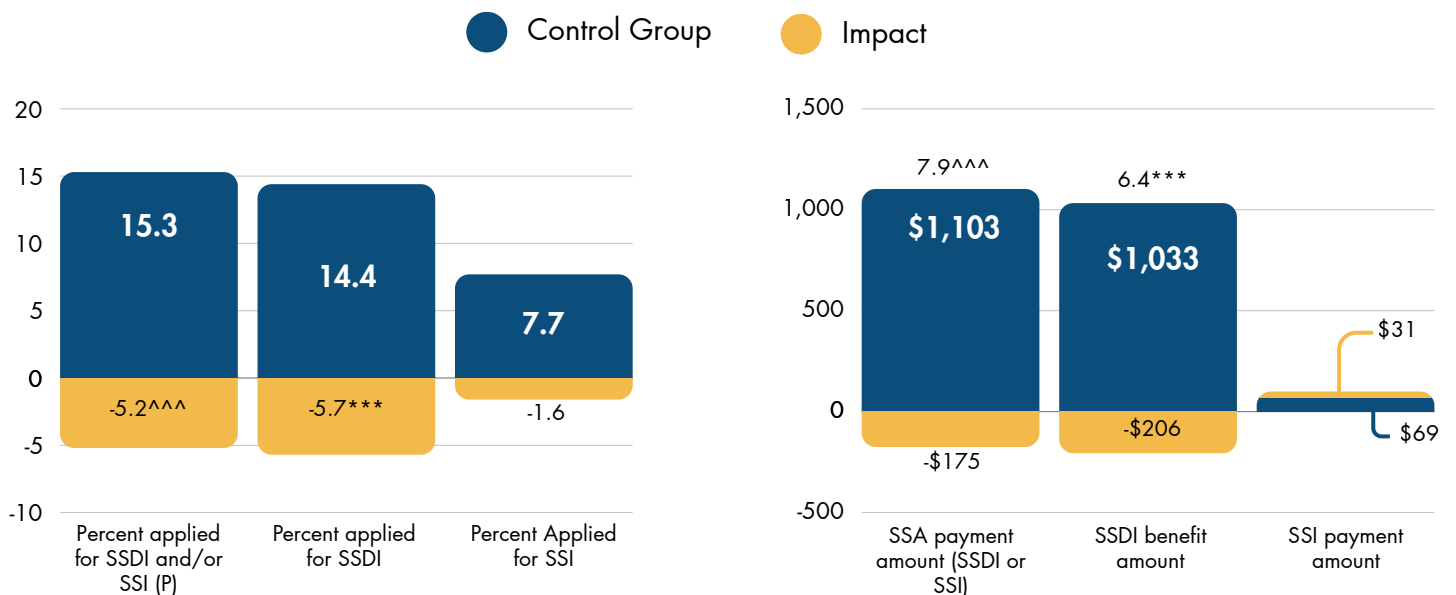
In the first year after enrollment, treatment participants had higher employment rates, labor force participation, and weekly hours worked. They also earned approximately \$3,551 more than individuals in the control group (Patnaik et al., 2025).

By the fourth quarter, 77% of the control group was employed with average earnings of \$29,469. Independent evaluation findings show that participants were 8 percentage points more likely to be employed compared to the control group (Patnaik et al., 2025).

ONE-YEAR IMPACTS ON SSDI AND SSI PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

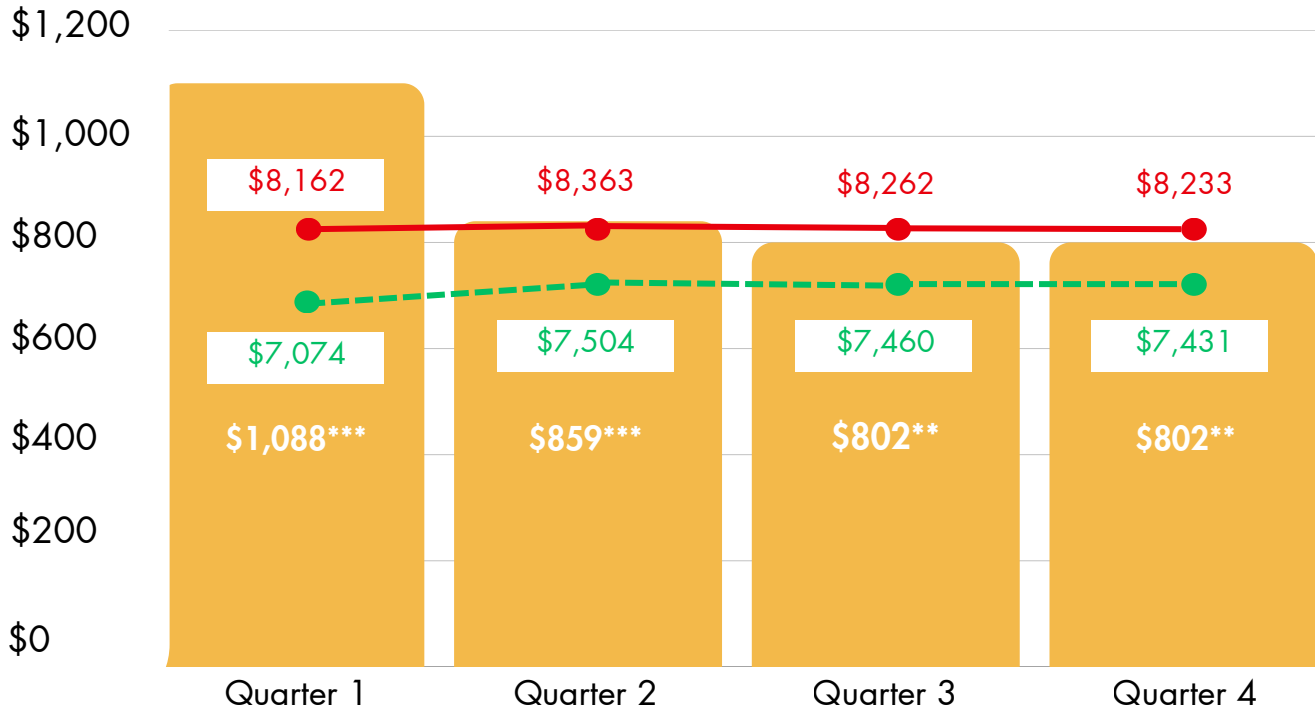
RETAINWORKS reduced the share of enrollees who applied for SSDI or SSI by one-third.

About 15 percent of the control group applied for SSDI or SSI during the 12 months after enrollment. Evaluation findings indicate that the program lowered the share of participants applying for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) by roughly five percentage points (Patnaik et al., 2025).



IMPACT ON EARNINGS DURING THE FOUR QUARTERS AFTER ENROLLMENT

● Treatment Group
 ● Control Group
 ● Impact



A simple forecast suggests that RETAINWORKS could produce net benefits for the three key perspectives within five years.

Because program costs are incurred up front but benefits accumulate over time, analyses estimated the annual earnings impact required for the program to break even. The program must generate \$1,469 in annual earnings impact per treatment enrollee to reach cost neutrality in five years, \$826 to break even in 10 years, and \$530 to do so in 20 years—equivalent to 41%, 23%, and 15% of the first-year earnings impact of \$3,551. These thresholds indicate that the program could break even within five years if even a fraction of the first-year earnings gains persist.

THE PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

“Working gives you a sense of self-worth, it makes you feel better about yourself, being able to provide for your family, is a feeling that I can’t explain, and not feel like they are a burden to their family or society.”

- RETAINWORKS PARTICIPANT



Remote Work Accommodation Support

Jill enrolled in **RETAINWORKS** after a long COVID diagnosis that limited her mobility and created transportation challenges. While she had accommodations for her on-site role, her home office was not equipped to support her needs once she transitioned to remote work, and financial strain added to the challenge. Jill worked with her Workforce Coordinator at the **KANSASWORKS** Workforce Center and her medical team to implement needed accommodations, including walking sticks and an ergonomic chair. She also received rental assistance. With these supports, Jill maintained her employment and continues to work remotely with stability.

Career Transition Support

Zoe enrolled in **RETAINWORKS** with a mood disorder and was working in a role where she felt unsupported and financially strained. After enrollment, she was also diagnosed with arthritis, which caused joint pain that affected her daily life and work. Zoe completed an employment plan with her Workforce Coordinator, received career guidance to explore more suitable job options, and was provided ergonomic equipment for her home office. With this support, she secured a new position with Community Care Network, reports strong satisfaction, and plans to transition to remote work after her probationary period while continuing to use the provided equipment.



CNA Training and Career Redirection

Kim enrolled in **RETAINWORKS** after an injury led to severe anxiety, depression, extensive occupational therapy, and significant medical expenses. Shortly before enrolling, her employer closed, leaving her without work, and transportation challenges required her to move in with her family. Through the program, Kim enrolled in CNA training, received supportive items and car repairs, and was provided charity care that eliminated her medical debt. A return-to-work plan helped align her training with a modified schedule. Kim completed her training, passed certification, and began interviewing in her new field, ultimately leaving the program with improved mental health, renewed confidence, and a clear path forward.

REFERENCES

- Patnaik, Ankita, Monica Farid, Isabel Musse, Irina Degtiar, Jillian Berk, Yonatan Ben-Shalom, Sarah Croake, Meagan Ager, Cayla Roby, Moriah Bauman, Karen Katz, Kara Peterik, Rosalind Keith, Jayna Jones, Ayesha De Mond, and Lauren Bendall. 2025. The Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration: Program Participation, Impacts, and Net Benefits During the First Year. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica.
- Patnaik, Ankita, Isabel Musse, Jillian Berk, Karen Katz, Monica Farid, and Yonatan Ben-Shalom. 2025. The Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration: Impacts Two Months After Enrollment. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica.
- Patnaik, Ankita, Isabel Musse, Jillian Berk, Karen Katz, Monica Farid, and Yonatan Ben-Shalom. 2025. The Retaining Employment and Talent after Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration: Impacts Two Months After Enrollment – Technical Appendix. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica.
- Keith, Rosalind, et al. 2024. RETAIN Demonstration Process Analysis. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica.
- Wickizer, Thomas M., et al. 2011. Improving Quality, Preventing Disability and Reducing Costs in Workers' Compensation Healthcare: A Population-Based Intervention Study. Medical Care.
- Wickizer, Thomas M., et al. 2018. Long-Term Outcomes of the Washington State Centers for Occupational Health and Education (COHE) Program. Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

VIEW THE REPORTS

- Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Evaluation: <https://bit.ly/RETAINEvaluation>
- The Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration: Evaluation Findings One Year After Enrollment: <https://bit.ly/RETAINFinalImpact>
- Early Assessment Report for the Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration: <https://bit.ly/RETAINEarlyImpact>

CHART KEY

- Asterisks (*, **, ***) show that a result is statistically meaningful. More symbols indicate stronger evidence.
- ^ Carets (^, ^^, ^^) show the result is statistically meaningful and lower than zero. These tests were used only for primary outcomes.
- (P) = Primary outcome; SSA = Social Security Administration; SSDI = Social Security Disability Insurance; SSI = Supplemental Security Income